

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of January 26, 2021**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Mark C. Anarumo (President, Norwich University), Daphne Larkin (Director of Media Relations & Community Affairs, Norwich University), Michael Bailey (Chair, Paine Mountain School District Board), Lawton Rutter (Ambulance Chief), Logan Potskowski, Sharon Smith, Amy Davis, Bill Clements, Anne Buttimer, and Carolyn Stevens.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

**III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)**

- a. Mark C. Anarumo, President, Norwich University.** President Anarumo first thanked the Select Board members for inviting him to speak tonight and he wished them all a "Happy New Year," as this was his first Select Board appearance in 2021. He said the Norwich University (NU) Spring 2021 semester has seen challenges already even though (remote) classes only started a couple weeks ago (01/11/21). President Anarumo said it had been expected that there would be about 1,900 students living on campus during this semester but it seems the number will be about 1,500. He understands that students and their parents would prefer to attend classes remotely under the current circumstances. President Anarumo said COVID-19 testing of students, faculty, and staff started on January 15, 2021 and of the 3,416 completed tests with results since then, there have been sixty-six (66) positive tests. Students who test positive are being quarantined in the Crawford Hall dormitory along with any who may have been exposed to the disease and are awaiting retesting. President Anarumo said students, faculty, and staff were tested every three (3) weeks during the Fall 2020 semester but weekly tests now will be conducted until the situation stabilizes. He noted the last semester saw sixteen (16) positive tests and all the individuals involved were asymptomatic. By contrast, about one-third of those testing positive this semester exhibited some symptoms. President Anarumo said the recent spike has postponed for a week the planned announcement of how the NU winter sports season will be conducted. He added that NU continues to abide by all state COVID-19 guidelines. The Select Board members did not have any specific questions for President Anarumo but all were appreciative of the work he has done so far. Board member Morse noted President Anarumo did not assume his position with any guidelines on how to handle a global pandemic but has done a great job in responding to the situation. President Anarumo noted today was the one-year anniversary of his appointment as NU President and agreed he could not have anticipated at that time the effect COVID-19 would have on university operations. Chair Maxwell then thanked President Anarumo for appearing tonight and stated his gratitude for all his efforts to keep the virus under control in the NU family while also keeping the Northfield community informed of his actions.

- b. Michael Bailey, Chair, Paine Mountain School District Board.** Chair Maxwell had asked Mr. Bailey to appear tonight so Select Board members could have a conversation with him regarding various school-related matters. He first asked if the School Board had completed its budget process. Mr. Bailey confirmed the School Board approved its proposed FY 2021/2022 budget unanimously last week and their meeting warning would be posted later this week. He said the budget total amount decreased slightly but he is uncertain how the State of Vermont will set the school tax rate. Mr. Bailey said we are probably looking at a five to six cent (5-6¢) increase on the local property tax rate. Chair Maxwell said the State of Vermont has provided municipalities with the option of mailing Town Meeting ballots to all registered voters. He asked how the School Board members felt about that. Mr. Bailey said he has been in contact with Town Clerk Kim Pedley and they agreed absentee ballots should only be sent out if requested by the voter. There wouldn't be sufficient turnaround time for ballots to be returned by election day given the time it would take the Town Clerk's Office to mail out about 3,500 ballots. Mr. Bailey added the School Board would hold an online meeting to explain and answer any questions about their budget prior to Town Meeting Day (03/02/21). Board member Morse thought it might be a good idea for the School Board and Select Board to share information regarding upcoming expensive capital projects they each might be planning. He noted the Select Board is now looking at bridge rehab/replacements along with a costly stormwater project over the next few years. Board member Morse felt some coordination between Town and School officials may result in properly spacing out these types of major projects in order to avoid spikes in the local tax rate. Mr. Bailey said the Paine Mountain School District's business manager keeps track of all upcoming projects so that funds can be budgeted over time to finance them over a number of years. Manager Schulz noted the Town does the same with its Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budgets. He felt it might be a good idea to share this information periodically with the School Board members to eliminate any fears of tax rate spikes. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Bailey for attending tonight and for the valuable information regarding the School budget. There seems to be every indication the School Board is doing its best to keep expenses under control.

#### **IV. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT**

- a. Lawton Rutter, Northfield Ambulance Chief.** Chief Rutter said Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) EMTs have conducted about 2,400 COVID-19 (nasal swab) tests to date. The laboratory does not share information with him about the number of positive tests so he cannot share this data. The NAS will continue to conduct daily testing as long as the State of Vermont allows them to do so. This probably will be at least until the end of March 2021 and also depends on how widespread is the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations. Chief Rutter noted the number of individuals arriving for testing has lessened in recent weeks but there still is a steady stream of them. Board member Goodrich asked when and where the tests were being done. Chief Rutter said testing is done at the NAS facility on Mondays (9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.), Tuesdays (4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.), Fridays (9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.) and Sundays (9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.). Testing is done in Williamstown on Wednesdays (9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.) and Saturdays (10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.) and in Montpelier on Thursdays (3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.). Board member Goodrich asked if appointments were required. Chief Rutter said they were strongly encouraged as it cuts down on the paperwork time. Board member Goodrich thanked NAS for providing this free service to the community.

As for COVID-19 vaccinations, Chief Rutter said his thirty-four (34) EMTs have received at least the first dose of the vaccine and some have either received the second dose or are scheduled to get it this week. He noted their reactions to the shots have been mixed and he expected all NAS EMTs to have been fully vaccinated within two (2) weeks. He added Northfield Firefighters all have received their first shots and should be fully vaccinated soon.

Chief Rutter noted that at the halfway point of the 2020/2021 fiscal year (01/01/21), NAS received 361 calls for service. This breaks down to 241 emergency transfers, 35 non-emergency transfers, 13 lift assists, and 72 non-transfer responses. There have been 281 billable calls for this timeframe, which is about a seventeen percent (17%) decrease from this time last year. As for the NAS Paramedic Level Certification that the Select Board members authorized at the last meeting (01/12/21), Chief Rutter said he has been working with Manager Schulz on the application forms. This will include a protocol regarding the handling and secure storage of the hard narcotics (Morphine, Fentanyl, etc.) that only certified paramedics can administer. The application has been reviewed by a medical advisor to NAS working out of the Central Vermont Medical Center and the feedback has been positive. The application will be sent to EMS District #6 for further review before it is sent on to the State of Vermont for final approval. Chief Rutter also is looking for possible grant opportunities to cover the extra expense of Northfield EMTs training for paramedic certification and licensing costs. He also plans to hold off ordering any paramedic supplies until state approval has been provided.

In addition to his NAS duties, Chief Rutter also serves as E-911 Coordinator for the Town of Northfield. He recently was informed by the State that a number of backroad addresses were found to be incorrect by TDS Telecom when it was updating its own database. Some of these errors are longstanding and others are more recent. In some cases, residents built new homes on their properties and kept the old addresses of their previous abodes. Chief Rutter will work with the Board of Listers to eliminate demolished structures from his E-911 system and to create proper addresses for new ones.

Chief Rutter also serves as Northfield's Health Officer with the assistance of Deputy Health Officer Chris Golder. He said they now have four (4) open cases that they are trying to resolve as soon as possible. Chief Rutter noted that with more people homebound due to COVID-19, there has been an increase in complaints made against neighbors. The activities now considered offensive might have gone undetected in normal times but became more evident during daylight hours, etc. Chief Rutter said most of the Health Officer complaints he received involve landlord-tenant disputes or problems involving neighbors.

Chair Maxwell wanted to know if NAS received extra compensation for conducting the COVID-19 tests. Chief Rutter said NAS has a contract with the State that provides reimbursement for the salaries of the EMTs doing the testing and an additional payment to cover other costs. Manager Schulz confirmed that as of January 12, 2021, Northfield had paid the EMTs about \$2,700 to conduct the testing and had received about \$4,700 from the State in compensation. Therefore, the testing is bringing in significant funding that more than covers personnel expenses. Chair Maxwell asked how was the NAS fleet. Chief Rutter said it was in good shape. The 2014 ambulance unit is scheduled for replacement in FY 2022/2023 but is performing well for now. He added that Town Mechanic Patrick Martin does an excellent job in keeping the NAS fleet in good shape. Chair Maxwell then thanked Chief Rutter for tonight's update.

**V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. **January 12, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. Board member Miller wanted it clarified in the minutes that Dustin's Pasture is a part of the Northfield Town Forest even though it is not contiguous with the parcels on Cheney Hill and Paine Mountain. The minutes also erroneously stated that the Select Board had difficulty getting a response from the State's Attorney's Office (Washington County) on a certain matter. Board member Goodrich said the communication problem actually had been with the State Attorney General's Office. **Motion to approve amended minutes passed 5-0-0.**

**VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. **Approval of Warrant #14-21.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #14-21 in the amount of \$354,950.26. Board member Stevens thought the municipality had a contract with Gillespie Fuels for the purchase of truck fuel but we seem to be purchasing from another supplier as well. Manager Schulz said the municipality purchases diesel fuel from Gillespie through a bid award and no-lead gasoline from Jack Corse, Inc. on the spot market. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through January 10, 2021.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$107,225.67. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**VII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. **Approval of 2021 Northfield Town Meeting Warning.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the 2021 Northfield Town Meeting Warning. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Open Session for this year's Town Meeting has been cancelled and all voting on all the articles will be done by Australian Ballot. This includes approval of the proposed FY 2021/2022 municipal budget. Manager Schulz noted a Public Hearing will be held on Tuesday, February 23, 2021 so that the public can ask questions about and comment upon all the ballot items. Board member Stevens asked if the budget article could be revised after this hearing. Manager Schulz said the hearing was informational only and none of the ballot items can be changed once the warning is approved. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Discussion of 2021 Northfield Town Meeting Ballots.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont State Legislature has approved new COVID-19 legislation regarding Town Meeting Day (H.48) that would permit local legislative bodies to require their municipal clerks to mail unsolicited absentee ballots to all registered voters. The State would cover the cost of postage but not reimburse for other employee time and expense. As indicated earlier, Northfield Town Clerk Pedley doesn't support this due to the insufficient turnaround time between when the ballots would be mass mailed and when they would have to be returned (03/02/21). It is her recommendation that Northfield keep to its traditional approach and only mail out absentee ballots to those who request them. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to only mail out Town Meeting absentee ballots by request. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Approval of Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) 2021 Certificate of Highway Mileage.** Manager Schulz said every year VTrans asks municipalities to certify their amount of highway mileage and indicate whether any changes were made in the previous year. The amount of VTrans financial assistance Northfield receives is based (in part) on the amount of Class 1, 2, and 3 highway the municipality maintains. There were no changes in Northfield highway mileage during 2020. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the VTrans 2021 Certificate of Highway Mileage. Board member Morse asked if there has been any consideration of throwing up one- and two-house roads to save on highway maintenance costs. Manager Schulz said the road discontinuance process was attempted in the summer of 2018 for fifteen (15) such roads but no subsequent action was taken due to vocal public opposition. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

#### **VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. **Northfield Ridge + River Routes (NRRR).** Manager Schulz said the draft NRRR report has been finalized and will be presented at a remote meeting on Friday, January 29, 2021 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The meeting link is available on the municipal website (northfield-vt.gov) and also has been posted on Front Porch Forum. The NRRR Steering Committee also would like to present this report to the Select Board members at a future meeting.
- b. **Revised Municipal Website.** As indicated at previous meeting, Economic Development Director Jon Ignatowski has been working for several months on an update to the municipal website. The revised website came online last week and it is quite impressive and much more user-friendly. Chair Maxwell confirmed it is quite an improvement.
- c. **Main Street Bridge Scoping Report.** Manager Schulz said VTrans representatives will be at the next regular meeting (02/09/21) to formally present the scoping report for the proposed Main Street Bridge rehab/replacement project and ask the Select Board members how they would like to proceed. The report was distributed to the Select Board members last November and it does make recommendations for total bridge replacement, how to divert traffic during the construction phase, etc. Since this project will greatly affect adjacent businesses as well as the Northfield community as a whole, this presentation will be well-advertised in advance.
- d. **Connecticut Attorneys Title Insurance Company Lawsuit.** As discussed at the last meeting, an out-of-state attorneys' group is suing nine (9) Vermont Town Clerks, including Northfield's, for restricting access to public records due to COVID-19 building closures, reduced hours, etc. A hearing on this matter will be held in a couple days and Manager Schulz and Town Clerk Pedley will participate remotely. The attorneys representing the Town Clerks also will be seeking summary dismissal of the lawsuit as they were only following the COVID-19 mandates put in place by Governor Scott.

#### **IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. **Online Municipal Bill Payment.** Board member Stevens noted a recent discussion on a local Facebook page regarding whether Northfield utility customers and property taxpayers should be able to review their accounts and pay their bills online. Manager Schulz said this matter needs to be researched first to determine whether it can be done in a cost-effective manner. Once this has been reviewed, it can be put on a future agenda. It was noted Northfield utility customers already have the ability to pay online.
- b. **Tickler File Update.** Board member Morse would like an update to the tickler file of upcoming municipal projects prepared by Manager Schulz last year and distributed to Select Board members that would include the aforementioned bridge and stormwater projects. Manager Schulz will work on this.

- c. **Boardman Drive.** Board member Morse noted this is a one-house road and since the former occupant (Donald Boardman) passed away in March 2019, the house itself has been vacant. He did not feel it appropriate for the municipality to be responsible for publicly maintaining a road that only led to an empty house. Perhaps the municipality should suspend maintenance of this road for the time being. Chair Maxwell said Boardman Drive was one of the roads the Select Board members considered privatizing in 2018. Some of the property owners who opposed taking control of adjacent roads suggested these roads could be “grandfathered” and public maintenance should end when the property changed hands. Perhaps this matter should be revisited for this particular road. In any case, there is a formal process with site inspections, public hearings, etc. that needs to be followed before any road can be discontinued.
  - d. **Recreation Committee.** Board member Morse noted the Recreation Committee that had six (6) members on the morning of December 1, 2020 is now down to four (4) members because of resignations. In addition, it is his understanding that only two (2) of the remaining members are active in that they attend the monthly meetings, etc. Board member Morse felt it might be best to suspend this committee’s activities for the time being until a new mission statement can be drafted and its membership reconstituted. Chair Maxwell noted Board member Goodrich has been acting as Select Board liaison to the Recreation Committee so perhaps Board member Morse should meet with her to discuss his own proposals for future action, etc.
  - e. **Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee.** Board member Goodrich serves on this subcommittee with Board member Stevens and she suggested meeting in the near future in order to discuss what building renovations have been done over the past year and what remains to be done in the near future.
  - f. **Turkey Hill Maple Farm Lease.** Board member Stevens understands Manager Schulz has contacted local forester Rose Beatty to inspect the municipal parcel (Dustin’s Pasture) that has been leased to a maple tree tapper. He asked if the Select Board members needed to authorize this action. Manager Schulz believes it was Select Board consensus at the last meeting that he should take this action. The cost is \$1,500 for the inspection and he believes such a minor expense is within his discretion.
- X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).** There was none.
- XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a personnel matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:43 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:15 p.m. No action was taken.

- XII. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager’s Office.

These minutes were revised and approved at the regular Select Board meeting of February 9, 2021.